

FORWARD TO

Sun Yat Sen's
“Kidnapped in London”

by

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The China Society
London
1969

FOREWORD

The kidnapping of Dr. Sun Yat Sen took place in 1896. This is a long time ago, and yet the affair never seems to lose its interest to judge by the number of times I am asked to tell the story or to correct myths that have grown up about it during the last seventy-three years. It seems, therefore, that the book about the affair that was written by Dr. Sun himself with my father's help and published only a month after his release, should be republished, and that this would be done most appropriately by the China Society, of which my father was a founder member.

Some of the background of the events that led up to the kidnapping are given in the book itself, but a little more is needed in view of Dr. Sun's subsequent amazing career in stimulating his countrymen to overthrow the Manchu dynasty and liberate themselves from an out-moded system. Dr. Sun always called my father his 'teacher' and it is evident from his writings that he did not mean this term to be confined to the teaching of medicine, important as that subject certainly was.

It was in 1887 that James Cantlie, M.A., M.B., F.R.C.S., a young and rising surgeon, moved himself and his family from London to Hong Kong. Considering his excellent prospects this was an unusual decision, but Cantlie was an unusual man who never accepted the rather humdrum progress up the professional ladder normal to his calling. He had already, in 1883, joined a party of medical men proceeding to Egypt to fight the cholera epidemic then raging, and retained his taste for adventure.

His move to Hong Kong had several causes apart from this. First, he wanted to study tropical diseases for he was, at heart, as much a physician as a surgeon. Second, he was an admirer of Dr. Patrick Manson whose place he was destined to take in Hong Kong; and thirdly, he and his wife were strongly attracted to

China and the Chinese and one of his wife's childhood ambitions had been to sit on the Great Wall of China.

On the long voyage to Hong Kong Cantlie drew up tentative plans for teaching Western medicine to young Chinese, for throughout his life his greatest enjoyment was to teach and impart knowledge. His departure from London had been regretted, especially by Charing Cross Hospital, for they rated him as the best demonstrator of anatomy they had ever had. He did more than demonstrate; he made his hearers remember his words, for he had developed a system of teaching all his own. In his hands the human anatomy became something richly humorous, and his lectures were punctuated by laughter. In Cantlie's own words "They laugh at the joke and remember the point", and those who, many years later, learned First Aid and Home Nursing from Cantlie during the 1914-18 war, still find it impossible to forget what he taught.

There was another facet to Cantlie's character and that was his urge to improve - to make, in his own joking words, "the world a slightly better place", and to win others over to his views. He had not been long at Charing Cross Hospital when he was asked to collaborate in writing a manual of 'First Aid in Civil Accidents' for the St. John's Ambulance Brigade. This opened his eyes to the damage that was being done by untrained helpers when handling injured people and made him a life-long champion of First Aid to the Injured. Very soon afterwards he joined the London Scottish Volunteer Regiment and was shocked to find that if the volunteer army ever became involved in actual warfare, there would be no organisation for dealing with the wounded except a small and over-extended regular Medical Staff Corps (later the Royal Army Medical Corps.) A Volunteer Medical Staff Corps seemed to Cantlie to be almost a necessity.

The fascinating story of what then happened is too long to here but is fully described in Cantlie's biography¹. By enthusiasm and eloquence he won over an ever-widening circle to his beliefs, and medical students at Charing Cross, and later at other hospitals, began to drill and train. To get such a revolutionary project as a new volunteer corps accepted by harassed officials coping with attenuated financial allotments and by those who could see no good reason for change, was no light task, but to see Cantlie coping with opposition was to see him at his best. He would gaily outflank and out-manoeuvre his opponents, and so great was his verve and charm that he converted many of t into adherents and left the remainder rueful but seldom resentful, for it had all been so light-hearted!

In due time the Volunteer Medical Staff Corps (later the R.A.M.C.(T)) became officially recognised and accepted. It was a remarkable example of what one man could do, given initiative energy, patience and good-humour.

As can be imagined, the arrival in Hong Kong of "that embodiment of irrepressible energy known as James Cantlie" made a considerable impact. It was not long before a branch of St. John's Ambulance had been started in the colony and soon the Peak Hospital followed, run at Cantlie's own expense. Then came most important of "Cantlie's fads", the College of Medicine the Chinese. A strong committee was formed, funds were obtained, and seven young Chinese became the first students, soon followed by others.

Of the original students the first and best was Sun Yat Sen a young man from a town near Canton, who tells you more about himself in this book. Both Cantlie and his wife took an immediate liking to Sun and formed a friendship that became life-long. He

¹ *Sir James Cantlie: a Romance in Medicine*, by N. Cantlie and G. Seaver (John Murray; 1939).

accompanied them when they visited leper colonies and made other expeditions, but nevertheless applied himself so closely to his studies that when he graduated he was awarded the Watson Scholarship, took first place in Chemistry, Minor Surgery and Clinical Observation, and second place in Botany, Physics and Physiology.

Sun Yat Sen was young and impressionable and has himself said how much he was influenced by Cantlie's energy, enthusiasm and unfailing good-humour, Cantlie must have told him the hilarious story of the creation of the Volunteer Medical Staff Corps; he knew about the branch of St. John's Ambulance and the Peak Hospital, and realised that he himself was studying at a College which owed its creation to Cantlie. That was not all, for he was present when Cantlie founded a debating society "to stimulate intellectual and cultural interests" and took a leading part in forming the Hong Kong Public Library.

It was borne in on Sun that there seemed to be no limits to what one man could accomplish if he believed in his cause and in himself and if he used persuasion, good-humour and patience and avoided heat and violence. It must have dawned on him that if Cantlie could do all these things, he, Sun Yat Sen, might do the same on a larger scale and bring about the regeneration of his beloved China. That was the core of the lesson that Cantlie taught Sun Yat Sen.

It stands to reason that Cantlie and Sun must often have discussed China's anaemic condition and possible remedies, though there is no record of such talks. Cantlie would have advocated reform by persuasion and consent and would have opposed force, for to the end of his life he said that revolutions destroyed more than they created. Sun has been called 'a born rebel' but Cantlie never found him so, and there seems no doubt that Sun at that time believed in peaceful reform, for he prepared a moderate and reasonable memorandum on reform which he hoped to lay before

the great Viceroy Li Hung-chang. Whether Cantlie was shown this document is uncertain, but he would certainly have approved of it. There is a conflict of opinion as to whether Sun Yat Sen and Li Hung-chang ever met, but even if they did the effect of Sun's eloquence was soon lost by the onset of the Sino-Japanese war. It may have been the humiliation of China's defeat in this war that made Sun believe that violence was the only hope. He certainly took a minor part in an uprising in Canton. This was an amateurish affair that inevitably failed, and Sun arrived in Hong Kong a fugitive and was smuggled by Cantlie onto a ship bound for Japan.

In 1896 Cantlie felt that the time had come to return to London. He had been working from 5.30 a.m. until 8 p.m. every day for eight years, and while Manson had been encouraging the elucidation of the role of the mosquito in malaria, Cantlie had noted the association of bubonic plague with rat-fleas and he was present when the bacillus was isolated by Yersin. He had travelled widely in China, India and Japan and his knowledge of tropical diseases was extensive. His departure with his wife from Hong Kong was a memorable and moving experience, and they sailed first for Japan where they said goodbye to many friends, and then to America via Hawaii. In Hawaii they met Sun Yat Sen, and Cantlie then suggested that as his exile from China was likely to be a long one, he should come to London and take an advanced medical course which would enable him to practise in other countries. Sun liked the idea and soon after the Cantlies had settled into 46 Devonshire Street, near the Chinese Legation in Portland Place, Sun made his appearance. He was found lodgings in Grays Inn Place and visited the Cantlies almost daily until his kidnapping.

That is the background to this book. I beg the reader's indulgence for the panegyric upon a remarkable father, of whom his son finds

it difficult to write without disclosing his feelings of admiration and affection.

I remember Dr. Sun well, although I was not born when the kidnapping took place, and the little boys mentioned in the book are my brothers². Dr. Sun always stayed with us whenever he came to London and two pictures stay in my mind. The first was at our country house in Hertfordshire and I must have been about five years old. It was sunset on a summer evening and Dr. Sun was walking up and down in the orchard. He was wearing a grey frock-coat and his homburg hat was tilted forward to keep the level sun out of his eyes. He had his hands behind his back and was pondering deeply. I was about to rush up to him in my usual impetuous way when I stopped. "He is probably thinking Great Thoughts" I said to myself, and I went quietly away. I was not in the least afraid of Dr. Sun, who was kindness itself, but my parents and my nurse may have put the idea into my head that here was a great man who must not be interrupted when he was thinking.

The second picture is in 1911. The revolution had broken out in China on October 10th. The outbreak was premature and Dr. Sun was in the U.S.A. To cross the Pacific undetected was clearly impossible and he therefore sailed for England, intending to proceed to China from there. He arrived in London and, as usual, stayed with us, at 140 Harley Street. One afternoon a telegram addressed simply to 'Sun Wen³ London' was brought round from the Chinese Legation. The legation had not only opened the

² Sir Keith Cantlie, I.C.S.(ret.); the late Admiral Sir Colin Cantlie, K.B.E., D.S.C.; Lt. General Sir Neil Cantlie, K.C.B., K.B.E., M.C., F.R.C.S.

³ Sun Wen was Dr. Sun's childhood or "given" name, by which he was, in fact, generally known in China (see Appendix p 69.)

telegram but they appeared to have deciphered it, for a Chinese character was written alongside each group of figures. My father and Dr. Sun were in Whitehall or the City and my mother was in a quandary. The legation was, she believed, adhering to the imperial regime and might be using this method of finding Dr. Sun's whereabouts. If she accepted it, it was tantamount to admitting his presence. If she refused it, Dr. Sun might miss something important. She therefore made a quick copy of the telegram, characters and all, and sent back the original to the messenger informing him that Sun Wen was not at the house.

My mother had then to go out, but left the copy of the telegram with a maid with instructions that it was to be given Dr. Sun as soon as he returned. This was done and Dr. Sun looked at it, smiled, and put the message in his pocket without a word. Later my mother came in and, at tea, asked Dr. Sun if he had received the telegram. "Yes, thank you" he replied. "Well", said my mother, "I hope it was something important as I took a lot of trouble copying the original message". Dr. Sun took the message from his pocket and looked at it. "You wrote this? Extraordinary. I can read it perfectly easily. As to importance - who knows? It is asking me to return to China and accept the Presidency." We all congratulated him heartily, at which he smiled quietly. "Good wishes, yes, but congratulations - well, wait five years and see if you can congratulate me then." It is a perfect illustration of Dr. Sun's quiet modesty and also of his foresight.

To the end of their lives he and my parents exchanged letters. We have many of his letters, but as we have no copies of what my parents wrote beyond some notes in my mother's diary, it is difficult to follow the matters discussed. Many of his letters ask for assistance in certain matters and for advice, which were undoubtedly given to the full.

I can best end by quoting my father's estimate of Dr. Sun. "I have never known anyone like Sun Yat Sen. If I were asked to name the most perfect character I ever knew, I would unhesitatingly name Sun Yat Sen."

Both are dead, but many of their works live after them.

31st January, 1969

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